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DATE: December 11, 1958

SUBJECT: Berlin

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PARTICIPANTS: Ambassador Wilhelm Grewe, German Embassy
Mr. Livingston T. Merchant - EUR
Mr. Alfred G. Vigderman - GER

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Ambassador Grewe called at his request to learn the Department's latest position on the Berlin problem as he was taking off for the Export-Import Commission meeting on Thursday, December 18, and would be seeing his Foreign Minister that evening.

Mr. Merchant said he thought the Paris meetings came at a good time, before positions were frozen. As he saw it now we could deal with the problem roughly as follows:

1. We would reject the Soviet proposal.
2. We would safeguard our rights in Berlin.
3. We would place the Berlin question in the framework of the larger question of Germany, and
4. We would express a willingness to negotiate with the Soviets in the broad frame of German reunification and European security.

Mr. Merchant then turned to the question of the German position on a zone of force and arms limitations, pointing out that if we were to negotiate with the Soviets we would have to have a limited position on European security. The Germans had recently indicated their withdrawal from previously agreed positions on the zone of force and arms limitations.

The Ambassador commented that

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Mr. Merchant expressed himself as reassured with what the Ambassador had said and then remarked that the Ambassador would not find the U.S. position in Paris either weak or wobbly. Any concept of "agency" in treating with the GDR had collapsed. The problem in being firm, however, was the problem of finding the place to make a stand.

The Ambassador went on to describe the Chancellor's position on Berlin. The West, according to the Chancellor, must have a common position. It cannot negotiate under threat. The elements of ultimatum in the Soviet note must be eliminated. Berlin had to be separated from any other questions about which we might negotiate with the Soviets.

The Ambassador then referred to a New York Times article by Sulzberger in which it had been suggested that West Berlin could be integrated into the Federal Republic and the Western garrisons replaced by Bundeswehr contingents. Ambassador Grewe went on to say it was his personal feeling that this proposal on the one hand would be unacceptable to the Soviets, and on the other hand was very dangerous. The presence of Bundeswehr units could not be equated to the presence of the allied forces for obvious psychological and political reasons. Moreover, the Sulzberger suggestion overlooks the very important question of free access to Berlin. Moreover, said Ambassador Grewe, the people of Berlin do not mind their occupation status. In part the West Berlin election was testimony to this fact.

The Ambassador then adverted to the idea attributed to Mayor Brandt involving the internationalization of communication lines between West Germany and West Berlin with UN forces assuring the freedom of Berlin. The Ambassador then asked rhetorically which UN members were ready to participate and accept such a responsibility. Mayor Brandt was impairing the present legal position with this proposal. It would plainly be difficult to cope with public opinion in opposing a proposal involving the creation of a four-sector free city guaranteed by the UN. It had to be remembered that if such a proposal were to be accepted and a new blockade imposed the West would then have the problem of taking care of the people who live in East Berlin as well as those in West Berlin so that the burden of countering a blockade was increased by the needs of one and one-half million people.

Mr. Merchant and the Ambassador agreed that there may be superficially attractive alternatives but none so far proposed were really acceptable.

The conversation

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The conversation then turned to the possibility of taking the Berlin problem to the International Court of Justice. Mr. Merchant thought such a move might have considerable merit at a later stage, after we made our position crystal-clear. It is a useful secondary operation, not to be undertaken until a Western reply had been registered. Ambassador Grewe agreed that it would be useful to provide the Soviets with this kind of possibility of retreat if the Soviets had in fact decided to retreat. The Ambassador remarked semi-seriously that before the Berlin problem was allowed to go before the International Court, a careful canvass ought to be made of the makeup of the present Bench in order to have some idea of how the matter was likely to be received by the Court.

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